

CHAPTER 34

May 17, 2011

"Has the target arrived at school?"

The entirety of the group had been hiding near the gates to the school, much to Justin's displeasure. It wasn't even just that he was morally opposed to this anymore; they looked absolutely ridiculous hugging up to the wall surrounding the gate. They weren't fooling anyone. Justin sighed slightly. What was he doing here anyway? They didn't need Justin for their little stakeout, and god knows he wanted no part in it.

"Yes, Ma'am! Visual ID confirmed! Target arrived in-zone near the end of his mess break, with mother rations in hand. Current status: In the bathroom, fixing his hair."

Justin rolled his eyes.

"Looks like we got a code 254-beige; the turd is in the punchbowl. Repeat, turd is in the punchbowl."

"The who, what, and the where now?"

Justin just shook his head at Yosuke. The joke had gone completely over his head. Chie seemed to get it, though she certainly didn't find it amusing. In all honesty, Justin had been ragging on her a lot as of late; though he knew she understood it was all in jest. Still, he kind of felt bad. It wasn't like she was doing anything wrong; she was just being Chie after all. He sighed slightly as he turned his attention back towards the school entrance. Yosuke simply shook his head at Justin before going back on his tangent.

"The target was acting nervous. I left my position before he had a chance to pick on me!"

"I'm sure you'll be getting a medal of honor for your bravery."

"I wonder what kind of plans they made... It didn't seem like he knew the boy that well."

Chie paused for a moment, scratching at the back of her head as though trying to think.

"Well, I think there's something more subtle--"

"Didn't we establish this yesterday?"

Seriously, didn't they? Justin thought he made it quite clear that at least one of them had been interested in the other. I guess the rest of the group was just having a hard time believing that Kanji of all people could swing that way. Even though that was a girl he was speaking to and not a boy. Justin was going to explain it all over again for everyone so that they finally got the jest, but that was interrupted by Chie speaking up.

"Oh, he's here!"

With those few words, the rest of the group pushed up against the walls of the gate; or at least, more so than before. Justin, of course, outright refused. They were actually making it WORSE by doing that. I mean they were at school. What was this Kanji guy going to do, beat them up for being on school grounds? They could have hidden in plain sight and had a better disguise than they did right now. Chie more or less had to grab Justin by the collar to pull him closer the group's hiding spot, as though expecting Justin to blow the entire operation. He just groaned slightly as she finished tugging at his shirt. This was absolutely ridiculous.

Sure enough, Chie had been right. Kanji soon made his way just in front of the gate. It was a wonder his peripheral vision hadn't picked up on them. It's not like they were hiding behind something, they were just hugging a wall. Even stranger still was the appearance of the girl in purple from earlier, not because she had showed up mind you, but because the entire gang had been right in front of her as she made her way up to Kanji. How in the hell did she not notice them. Or had she and chosen to ignore them? At this point Justin had thrown all logic out the window. Apparently it wasn't getting him anywhere in life.

"I didn't keep you waiting, I hope?"

"No, I-I just got here too..."

And with that, no more words were exchanged between the two as they departed from the school. Justin had half expected the group to follow behind, as they had made it out to sound like they were. Instead the simply made their way out of the hiding spot and started to discuss what they had seen. Justin couldn't help but sigh slightly in relief; at least they weren't getting too involved in their private business. It could have been a lot worse.

"What in the world was that?"

"Oh, a-anyways! We gotta hurry after them or we'll lose them!"

Justin had been starting to smirk with relief, though that went right out the window the moment that Chie had suggested following them. Justin had thought it would come down to that, but all the same, it wasn't something he would be comfortable with.

"Okay... Then let's split up into two groups. One team will follow Kanji, and the other will stake out the shop."

"R-Roger that. How should we split the teams?"

"I'll go with Yukiko to stakeout the textile shop." Yu spoke up almost immediately. Justin couldn't help but breathe a slight chuckle under his breath. *Way to go Yu; you sly dog.*

"Alright, then me and Chie will keep an eye on Kanji."

Justin raised an eyebrow. Yosuke was pairing up with Chie, and Yu was pairing up with Yukiko. He understood that much. So why the hell did no one pair Justin into a group.

"Uh... Aren't you forgetting someone?"

"Huh? You're going with Yu and Yukiko, right?"

Yu only dropped his eyes in disappointment. He knew Justin was completely opposed to following Kanji around, which meant he probably would tag along with those two. Justin gave Yu a quick glance before turning his attention back over to the other two, gathering them in a huddle. Chie and Yosuke seemed slightly confused what they were bunching up like that for, but they did it nonetheless. Justin didn't even bother to see how Yu and Yukiko were reacting to this; he couldn't imagine very well.

"Uh... Don't you think we should let those two do their thing?"

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean, Yosuke."

Yosuke only starred at Justin for a brief moment before his eyes widened with realization. It seemed it didn't really dawn upon him that he knew Justin knew Yu had a thing for Yukiko.

"Oh... You mean that. Well I guess so, but... Are you sure about this? I know you weren't a big fan of this plan yesterday."

"I'm still not, but if we're going to evade Kanji's privacy, we might as well give someone else theirs."

Chie only raised a slight eyebrow in confusion. It seemed she hadn't quite caught on to what Yosuke and Justin were talking about, despite knowing very well that Yu had a thing for Yukiko, and potentially the other way around. I guess it never really dawned upon her that Yu hadn't really had an excuse to get Yukiko and him alone before.

“Uh... so Justin’s coming with us?”

“Well gee. Don’t sound so happy about it.”

“No no, it’s not that!” Chie blurted out trying to cover the bases, “I was just making sure is all!”

“Alright then, break.”

And with that the three ended their huddle, turning towards Yu and Yukiko.

“Alright you two, Justin’s going to be coming with us instead.”

Yu’s eyes brightened up almost immediately as he passed a smile Justin’s way. He had known Justin had been the one to talk Yosuke and Chie into letting him go with them, not the other way around. Justin responded by giving him a quick nod of his head, a wide smirk across his face. Yukiko on the other hand seemed slightly confused.

“Huh? How come?”

“Well, uh...”

“So I can keep an eye on these two if they do something stupid.”

“Nice save.” Yosuke whispered over to Justin.

Justin responded by slamming the top of his fists into Yosuke’s. Justin was actually kind of surprised Yosuke had followed up Justin’s invitation to slam fists together so quickly. It wasn’t like they had a secret handshake or anything, so it sort of struck him as odd that Yosuke was able to react so quickly and without hesitation.

“Oh man, they’re almost out of sight!”

Justin and Yosuke turned their attention over to Chie. They had completely forgotten that they still needed to catch up with the two. Justin only hoped that whatever information it was they needed that they hadn’t missed it. If they had to do this, he’d at least like for there to be some fruits of their labors.

“C’mon you two.”

“Alright, we’ll need to pretend we’re on a date to make it look natural!”

Yosuke smirked slightly as the comment came out of his mouth. Justin simply glared at him. He was doing it on purpose. And it was fucking working too. Justin could feel his blood boiling with rage as Yosuke gave him that look. It took every fiber of his being not to deck him again, right there and then.

“Ugh, not in a million years!”

“Sorry. You’re not my type, Yosuke. Oh wait. I’m sorry, it seems I was mistaken. Were you just trying to go on a “date” with my girlfriend? Funny. I remember something like that coming up yesterday too. How are those wisdom teeth again?”

Chie blushed slightly. Sure Justin was being an over jealous and overly protective prick right about now, but she was still flattered all the same. And also kind of embarrassed. She had never thought Justin would outright admit to the two dating in front of the rest of the group; even if they all already knew.

“Relax, I’m just kidding!”

“I’m not.”

“Sheesh, you two... Let’s hurry up and go!”

“Uh... Yosuke?”

“Shh! Quiet.”

“You mind NOT standing like that behind my girlfriend?”

Yosuke and Chie turned their attention backwards to Justin. Yosuke seemed to have no idea what was going on, though Chie immediately did, much to her disgust. See, Chie had crouched down on her knees next to a tree, almost in a crawling position, for god only knows what reason. It couldn’t possibly have helped her hear or see better, right? And if it was supposed to be for hiding why hadn’t she done that behind the tree instead of next to it. Yosuke had decided that apparently the tree was a good place to stand too, opting to stand right over Chie’s rear end. I don’t think I need to explain why the way the two were positioned looked completely and utterly wrong. Needless to say, Justin was not too pleased. He couldn’t even tell if Yosuke was doing it on purpose anymore, or if he was actually this fucking stupid. Either way, Chie practically ripped him a new one once she noticed him standing over her like that.

“Yosuke, what the hell are you doing!?”

“Huh?”

“Back off, buster!”

Yosuke was completely confused. What the hell were those two getting on his back for. It took him a moment to realize exactly what was up, as he looked down towards Chie.

“What- Oh shit! Sorry, my bad!”

And with that Yosuke jumped away from Chie faster than a cheetah hunting gazelles. He half expected Justin to beat the living shit out of him for it, though Justin just dismissed it as Yosuke being an idiot like usual. He clearly hadn't done it intentionally, so he guessed there was no harm done. So long as he didn't do it again. Because if he did, Justin was going to beat the ever loving crap out of him.

Chie and Justin just shook it off, turning their attention back towards Kanji and that girl he had been walking with. They hadn't really said anything, though that sort of put Justin on edge. He could imagine that if the two really were into each other, that just a quiet walk on the park would be something special for them. Of course, it seemed they had just met, so he wasn't quite sure how far that theory went. All the same, Justin felt like he was intruding on something more simply because they HADN'T been talking.

"Man, this is weird..."

"Yeah... We definitely stand out."

"Well you did just a moment ago!"

"It was an accident!" Yosuke practically shouted. Justin had to run over and place his palm against Yosuke's mouth, lest Kanji and the girl in purple hear him.

"No! I mean THEM! I get this weird feeling about them..."

"Weird? What about them's weird?"

"Umm... I don't know how to put it."

Justin did. In fact, he knew exactly how to put. It's not like he had explained it to them twice already or anything like that. Jesus, he felt like he was talking to a brick wall sometimes. *That's it, fuck it. No more talking during these meetings. It just goes over everyone's heads anyway.*

"Maybe it's just my imagination..."

There was a brief pause in the exchange between the three. Justin took the opportunity to look over at Kanji and the girl. They still weren't saying anything to each other, much to Justin's confusion. It was kind of adorable in a way, but he knew they barely knew each other. There had to be some sort of catch here.

"Hey, how do you think the others are doing?"

"Beats me. For all we know, he's hitting on Yukiko as we speak."

Chie paused for a brief moment, opting to get out of her kneeling position to make their way back out to the road. It seemed that Kanji and that girl had gone on far enough ahead that they didn't need to worry about hiding at the moment. Justin

only hoped that the two didn't miss anything while they were talking about Yu's love life.

"Yeaaaaah, no. He's not like you."

Justin couldn't help but chuckle slightly.

"You do realize there was a reason I came along with you guys and not them, right?"

"What, it wasn't to spend time with me?" Chie joked slightly. Justin laughed slightly shaking his head to the side. He wouldn't object to that, but that wasn't why.

"Ugh, get a room you two."

"I have a house. Does that count?"

"Sure, more power to you."

Yosuke looked like he was going to gag at any second. Funny, for a guy that liked to jab at them for being a couple, he sure seemed to be awfully disgusted by the thought of the two together. Though, Justin couldn't half blame him. He was like that too when they first got together. He still was to a certain extent.

"So, wait. Why did you tag along with our group anyway?"

Justin raised his eyebrow slightly.

"Really? You were there when I explained it."

"Does Chie even know?" Yosuke asked. He understandably didn't want to tell Chie if she didn't already know. Knowing her, she'd probably tell Yukiko everything.

"Yeah, I sorta dropped the ball on that one. You remember how I said Yu had a crush on Yukiko?"

"Yeah...? Oh. OH! I get it now. You two are leaving the two alone to try and hit it off."

"Bingo."

"Well that was awfully nice of you. I know you didn't really want to come with us to keep an eye on Kanji."

Justin was about to say something when he felt someone's presence approaching from behind. He knew damn well who it was too. Chie just had to open her mouth just then. Hell, hadn't she noticed him coming? She had been facing in that general direction.

“...The hell are you three doing?”

Yosuke immediately started to panic at the sound of Kanji's voice. Justin did to an extent to, though he manage to keep his calm exterior, opting to move over in such a way that he could get a good view on Kanji, Yosuke and Chie. It actually looked like he was backing away from Kanji, though, much to Justin's displeasure. He wasn't afraid of Kanji, and he didn't want to give off the impression that he was.

“Oh, well, you see... We're... We're just two crazy lovebirds!”

Justin immediately turned to give Yosuke a glare. Yosuke had seen it though he didn't seem quite as afraid of Justin as he was Kanji; despite Justin actually beating Yosuke on a fairly regular basis. There's an expression about the enemy you know, though Yosuke had apparently thrown the logic behind that out the window. Either way, Justin was pissed. So was Chie, given the look on her face. She looked like she was going to rip his head off at any second.

“Uh, whaddya mean bird!?”

“Oh, that's the part you're offended by!?”

“Play along, birdbrain.”

Kanji took a step forward, prompting Chie and Yosuke to step back in fear. Justin didn't so much as budge, though that put him right next to Kanji at the moment. It was actually slightly awkward, though Justin thought he'd make a point. He crossed his arms as Kanji gave him a strange look before turning back towards the other two.

“Didn't I see you guys yesterday...?”

Yosuke laughed an incredibly forced, fake, and otherwise awkward laugh. Justin couldn't help but sigh. People told Justin he was a bad liar all the time, but this was just ridiculous. Yosuke was completely blowing it!

“C-C'mon, it just so happened that we were walking behind you guys. Pure coincidence! H-Hey! Our houses are just over that way, so we'll be going now...”

And then it happened. Chie opened her mouth and dropped the bomb. Like, she didn't just drop the bomb, she fucking nuked the entire place, stole the place she nuked's nukes, and then nuked it again. And then, when she was done nuking it, she took the remains, and used it to build more nukes.

“Um, look, we weren't planning on getting in you guys' way, and there's nothing strange about it, either...”

Justin couldn't help but shove his face into his palm. *I'm in love with an idiot.*

“S-Strange...!?”

“Why can’t you keep your big mouth shut!?”

Without warning, the two made a mad-dash away from Kanji. Justin mouth almost dropped in disbelief. Not only had they ran away from the guy they were supposed to be questioning, they fucking left Justin behind with him. It wouldn’t even be a problem if the two hadn’t completely pissed Kanji off. *I am going to KILL those fuckers.* Cool with him or not, there was no way in hell Justin was going to stay behind with this guy. Justin soon followed behind, Kanji but mere steps behind him. It took all of Justin’s energy to catch up with Yosuke and Chie. And he sure as hell wasn’t happy about it.

“What the fuck, you guys!?”

“Justin!” Chie seemed happy to see that Justin hadn’t been ripped to shreds, though Yosuke seemed almost panicked that Kanji hadn’t been distracted by Justin’s noble sacrifice.

“You left me behind!?”

“W-Well, you seemed like you could handle yourself.”

“You know Yosuke, you’ve pissed me off not twice, not thrice, but four fucking times today! If I were you, I wouldn’t stop running!”

Yosuke quickened his step ever so slightly so he could get in front of Justin, lest he try to strangle him mid-escape.

“This ain’t what you think! Y-You got it all wrong!”

“Oh shit, he’s gaining on us!”

“You say that like it’s a bad thing!”

“It is a bad thing!!”

“Sounds to me like he’s just trying to explain something.”

“With his fists maybe!”

“You are just the worst, Yosuke, you know that!”

“Hey! Are you listening, dammit!? It seriously ain’t like that!”

“What the hell is he talking about!?”

“Oh my god Yosuke, you are so fucking stupid it hurts. It fucking HURTS!”

“Yeah, well explain it to me, since you seem to know fucking everything!”

“That’s why it fucking hurts Yosuke. I explained it at LEAST twice!”

“Dude, whatever!”

It took a while before the two were able to out-run Kanji, though, running around in circles probably didn’t help. It was much more likely that he just gave up his pursuit of the trio, figuring it just wasn’t worth the effort he was putting into it. After all, who cared what they thought of him. It wasn’t like he knew them or anything. The three soon after managed to escape back at the rendezvous point with Yu and Yukiko, completely out of breath by the time they came to a stop in front of the two.

“We regret to inform... Our mission failed.”

“There was nowhere to hide...”

“Well maybe if you two didn’t run away like that...!”

Yu and Yukiko seemed more than a little upset at the trio. It wasn’t like they had all that difficult of a task. All they had to do was stay out of sight and listen in on the conversation between Kanji and that girl in purple. Actually, come to think of it, what did happen to that girl? Clearly she had been with Kanji before he had chased the three of them off. Maybe they parted ways before Kanji turned around and spotted the three of them.

“Well... Let’s wait her a little longer. Maybe Kanji-kun will come home.”

“Ugh, I hope not. I already have a splitting headache.”

“Huh...? What are you guys doing here?”

“And speaking of the devil...”

Justin slowly turned around to face the source of the sound. Kanji had finally made his way back around to his house, much to Justin’s displeasure. His head was pounding like no tomorrow, so he wasn’t in the mood for any more of these Kanji shenanigans. Honestly, he felt slightly light-headed too; probably because he hadn’t had a chance to smoke all day. Addictions are a bitch.

“You’re those stupid lovebirds I just saw!”

Justin just sighed. He really was going to kick Yosuke’s ass when all of this was over.

“We are not a couple!”

“Those two are though.” Yosuke shrugged. Justin responded by punching him in the gut. Why the fuck did he think he had any right to tell Kanji that? I mean, god only knows how awkward that must be, being told that out of three people, two of them

had been faking being a couple when in actuality it was her and the other guy that were a thing. Why make up a bullshit story about being a couple, when there already was a couple there. It made no fucking sense! Yosuke gasped out for air slightly as he fell to his knees.

"Okay... I deserved that..." *Damn straight you did.*

"I get to punch him next time." Chie added. She wasn't exactly fond of Kanji knowing about them being a couple either. Justin couldn't really blame her with how afraid she had apparently been of him.

"Why are you assholes followin' me around!? Dammit, what the hell's going on!?"

Kanji stared at the group of teenagers for a brief moment, most of them reeling back slightly in fear; the exceptions to the rule being Justin, who had never been afraid of Kanji, and Yosuke, who had just been getting back to his feet from Justin's blow to his gut. He sighed slightly before transitioning back into speech.

"I ain't sayin' this is you guys' fault... But... Dammit!"

There was another brief pause of silence as the group looked around at each other. Most everyone seemed confused, even Justin to an extent. Kanji seemed really confused about something, though Justin seemed to have a good idea what. Still he had to wonder if that was really what Kanji was confused over, or if it had something to do with everyone fucking stalking him for the last two days.

"Hey, uh... mind if we ask something? Has anything strange happened to you lately?"

"Huh? Strange...?"

"Goddammit, you two. Stop using that word."

"What's this 'strange' stuff, huh!? Are you saying that I'm strange!?"

"People are strange when you're a stranger."

Justin shrugged. It was true. The only reason Kanji seemed strange to the group was because they didn't really know him. He had hoped his hastily scrapped together song reference would calm Kanji down slightly, but alas, it seemed the meaning had gone completely over his head.

"Huh? N-No, I didn't mean--!"

"You shitheads better get the hell out of my face, or I'm taking you down!"

"Wha--!? Wait, why!?"

"I look like I'm joking!?"

Kanji's voice was cracking really badly at this point. He had apparently gotten angry enough at this point that he was trying to shout way past his vocal range. Looking around the group, everyone had started to freak out more than a little bit. Of course, that was immediately remedied by Kanji running head-long at them, sending everyone flying in opposite directions. Hell Yosuke even ran into a wall at one point. Justin couldn't help but slap his face with the palm of his hand. Unlike the others Justin did not run. Apparently Kanji was more than a little confused that Justin hadn't run off like the others.

"Do people always do this?"

"Huh!? Look, you better--!"

"There's nothing wrong with being strange, you know. If there was, I would have put a bullet in my skull years ago."

Justin flashed Kanji a quick grin before strolling down the alleyway, trying to catch up with the rest of the gang. Kanji just stood there, jaw slightly ajar. He wasn't entirely sure what the hell happened: why Justin hadn't run, why he had made that comment to him, none of it. He starred off in Justin's general direction for only a brief moment before turning around to go enter the textile store.

"Urgh... Too much running..."

Justin could hear Chie and the rest of the group gasping for air as he rounded the corner. Apparently they hadn't really noticed Justin rounding the corner at all, as they had apparently been talking about him while he was making his way over here.

"Oh man, you think they got him?"

"I'm right here Yosuke. Don't start dividing up my stuff just yet."

"Justin! Oh thank god!"

Chie rushed forward and wrapped her arms around Justin's waist. He couldn't help but be a little surprised by the gesture, for a number of reasons. First and foremost being that he had thought Chie wouldn't be the type to show public affection like this. The second was that she had clearly been concerned about him; like, really fucking concerned. What the hell did they think Kanji was going to do with him? Worst come to worst, he'd have a black-eye or two. No big deal really. Really, Justin sort of assumed Yosuke had said something to get her riled up like that, especially given the look on his face as Justin rounded the corner. He hadn't really been grimacing. Hell, it actually kind of looked a little like a smirk.

"Whoa, easy. I'm all right."

Yu and Yukiko simply smiled as Chie raised her head from the two's embrace. Her eyes were watering slightly, though she had a wide grin on her face. Justin really couldn't tell from where he was standing, but it was actually pretty adorable. Yosuke, on the other hand, looked like he was going to barf. Chie eventually let go of her grip on Justin, stepping off towards his side, a pinkish shade to her cheeks.

"Well, nothing happened today, so I guess everything's okay..."

Yosuke paused, trying to make it clear he had meant the situation with Justin as well as the situation of Kanji's kidnapping. Justin of course realized that the situation involving him had been entirely fabricated by Yosuke. He shot Yosuke a quick glare, making it clear to him that he was on to his tricks. Yosuke responded by averting eye contact and coughing slightly.

"But it's already been a few days since he appeared on the Midnight Channel. If this is anything like Yukiko's case, it'll happen soon."

"Then we can't let our guard down... I think we should come back tomorrow to check up on him."

"Yeah, I don't see that working to well, what with us STALKING him."

"Looks like we've got no choice. Let's go home. I'm wiped..."

Yukiko and Yosuke were the first ones to leave, though Yu, Chie, and Justin had opted to stay behind for a moment. It was silent between the three for a good while as they watched Yosuke and Yukiko go their separate ways. It took a while before Justin turned his attention over to Chie.

"What did Yosuke tell you?"

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"What he said about me and Kanji."

"Oh... that..."

Chie averted eye-contact for a moment.

"That bad?"

She only nodded her head in response. Justin sighed slightly, wrapping his arm around Chie's shoulder.

"Do me a favor. Write down a list of all the things Yosuke said Kanji was doing to me so I can do all of it to him later. It'll be like, poetic justice or something."

Chie's gloomy face lightened up slightly; not so much because Justin had threatened Yosuke with violence, but because he actually seemed to care about

what Yosuke had made her feel like. She smiled a bit before easing her way out of Justin's grip.

"Alright, I will."

She leaned up slightly and gave Justin a quick peck on the lips before making her way out of the alleyway. Justin watched her as she left, giving her a quick wave as she departed from the scene. In all honesty, though, Justin's mind hadn't been on Chie's departure. His lips were tingling at this point. He wasn't entirely sure how to feel about it. They had been dating for a couple of weeks or so now, but they hadn't actually kissed since that encounter in the alleyway. It still felt strange to Justin. He briefly wondered if it was just him being a weirdo, or if that was how it was supposed to feel.

He sighed slightly as he snapped back into reality. It had just dawned upon him that this had all just went down in front of Yu. Justin swapped a glance with him out of the corner of his eye. He was expecting embarrassment or disgust. Instead he found only a smile and brightly lit eyes. Strange, he always imagined people would react poorly to seeing that kind of stuff, not find joy in it.

"S-sorry about that."

"Don't be." You chuckled slightly.

Justin rubbed at the back of his head. Yu clearly didn't mind the display he had just seen between Chie and Justin just a moment ago, but he still felt embarrassed all the same. He stared off into the horizon for a brief moment before turning back to Yu.

"So..."

"Hm?"

"How'd it go with you and Yukiko?"

Yu smiled as the words left Justin's mouth. He reached around into his pocket, shuffling through his belongings; for what, Justin could only guess. After a few seconds, he pulled out his cell-phone. He flipped it open and pressed a few buttons on it before pointing the screen towards Justin. Justin couldn't help but laugh as he saw the message on the screen.

You have added Yukiko Amagi to your contacts.